

## The National Longitudinal Surveys

Sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), NLS data collection and user services are provided, under contract, by CHRR at The Ohio State University and NORC at the University of Chicago. Funding for the NLSY79 Child/Young Adult survey is provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

### NLS cohort topics include:

Demographic and family background, education, military experiences, job characteristics and training, labor market status and histories, marital and family characteristics, income and assets, transfers of time and money, retirement, geographic location and mobility, health, nutrition, and physical activity, fertility and parenting, sexual activity, attitudes and expectations, behaviors and perspectives, environmental characteristics, and civic engagement.

### Additionally, NLSY79 Child and Young Adult surveys include:

Assessments of the quality of the home environment, cognitive development, temperament, and motor, social and emotional development.

### How do I obtain NLS data?

National Longitudinal Surveys data are made available to researchers through the Investigator website at: [nlsinfo.org/investigator](https://nlsinfo.org/investigator). Investigator allows users to search for variables of interest for any NLS cohort, create simple tabulations of the data, extract data sets for analysis, and access documentation. NLS public data are immediately available and free of charge.

### Where do I get more information?

Visit the NLS website at: [nlsinfo.org](https://nlsinfo.org) for online access to questionnaires and other documentation, a searchable, annotated bibliography of NLS research, news releases, updates, information on obtaining restricted-access data, such as geocoded files, and much more.

Questions about NLS data should be directed to NLS User Services: [usersvc@chrr.osu.edu](mailto:usersvc@chrr.osu.edu) or **614-442-7366**.

Questions about BLS publications and restricted-access NLS data should be directed to: [NLS\\_info@bls.gov](mailto:NLS_info@bls.gov) or **202-691-7410**.

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# Using the NLS to Study HEALTH

# National Longitudinal Surveys



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## What are the National Longitudinal Surveys?

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) are a set of surveys sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the U.S. Department of Labor. The NLS has gathered information at multiple points in time on the labor market experiences and other significant life events of seven cohorts of men and women.

## Which NLS cohorts have health data?

Detailed health data are available for all three ongoing NLS cohorts. Health data were also collected for all four original NLS cohorts (for which data collection has ended), although in less detail than the ongoing cohorts.

### 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97):

Began in 1997 with 8,984 men and women born in 1980-84 (ages 12-17 in 1997). Sample members were interviewed annually from 1997 to 2011 and biennially thereafter. The 2021 interview was conducted with 6,713 men and women ages 36-42. In addition, a COVID-19 Supplement was fielded in 2021.

### 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79):

Began in 1979 with 12,686 men and women born in 1957-64 (ages 14-22 in 1979). Sample members were interviewed annually from 1979-1994 and biennially thereafter. Oversamples of military and economically disadvantaged, non-black/non-Hispanic respondents were dropped in 1985 and 1991, leaving a sample size of 9,964. The 2020 interview was conducted with 6,535 men and women ages 55-64.

**NLSY79 Child and Young Adult (CYA):** Began in 1986 with children born to female NLSY79 respondents. Biennial data collection consists of a battery of cognitive, socioemotional and physiological assessments, interviews with the mothers, and interviews with the children themselves; from 1994 onward, children turning age 15 and older during the survey year have been administered a Young Adult questionnaire

that is similar to the NLSY79 questionnaire. In 2016, interviewed NLSY79 mothers completed the Mother Supplement for children in the household at least part-time who were 0 to 13 years of age as of the end of 2016, and children 12 and older were included in the Young Adult data collection. To date, more than 10,000 children have been interviewed in at least one survey round.

**Older Men (OM):** Began in 1966 with 5,020 men born in 1906-21 (ages 45-59 in 1966). Sample members were interviewed 12 times from 1966 to 1983. A final interview in 1990 was conducted with 2,092 respondents who were 69-83 years old, and 2,206 family members of deceased respondents.

**Mature Women (MW):** Began in 1967 with 5,083 women born in 1922-37 (ages 30-44 in 1967). Sample members were interviewed 21 times from 1967-2003. The final interview in 2003 was conducted with 2,237 women ages 66-80.

**Young Men (YM):** Began in 1966 with 5,225 men born in 1941-51 (ages 14-24 in 1966). Sample members were interviewed 12 times from 1966 to 1981.

**Young Women (YW):** Began in 1968 with 5,159 women born in 1943-53 (ages 14-24 in 1968). Sample members were interviewed 22 times from 1968-2003. The final interview in 2003 was conducted with 2,859 women ages 49-59.

## Which NLS data are relevant to health research?

The following topics have been covered in varying detail in the NLS cohorts.

- Height and weight (measured by interviewer for Child respondents; self-reported for all other respondents, including Young Adults)
- Self-reported assessments of current health, health conditions (hypertension, cancer, etc.), sensory function, work injuries
- Health limitations to employment and daily activities, limitations of respondents' spouses for select cohorts
- Mental health, including the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale in all cohorts but the Young Men and NLSY97, the Affect Balance Scale in the Older Men and Mature Women, and the Mental Health Inventory in the NLSY97
- Drug, alcohol, and cigarette use (all except Young Men)
- Medical insurance coverage (all except Young Men)
- Age of death (all except Young Men) cause of death for Mature Women, Young Women, and Older Men, age and cause of death of parents for select cohorts
- Birth weight (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Experiences related to pregnancy, including weight gain, substance use, and prenatal care (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Experiences related to sexual activity and contraception (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Diet and exercise (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Health care usage and preventive health care (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Special medical equipment (OM)
- Menopause (MW, YW)
- Menarche (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Puberty (CYA, NLSY97)
- Infertility issues (NLSY97)
- Aging-related cognitive function (NLSY79, MW, OM)
- Early-life traumatic and stressful events (NLSY79, NLSY97)
- Health-related knowledge (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Handedness (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Limited respondent-reported information on the health of parents and other family members (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)
- Caregiving to ill or disabled family members (NLSY79, CYA, MW, YW)
- Assessments of early-childhood physical health, behavior, and cognition (CYA)
- Extensive assessments of past/current health conditions at select ages (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97, YW)
- Self-reported tolerance towards risk (NLSY79, CYA, NLSY97)